Central Florida Intelligence Exchange

San Diego Law Enforcement Coordination Center

Utah Statewide Information & Analysis Center

JOINT INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

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(U//FOUO) Criminal and Violent Extremist Use of Emojis

(U) Scope

(U//FOUO) The Central Florida Intelligence Exchange (CFIX), San Diego Law Enforcement Coordination Center (SD-LECC), and the Utah Statewide Information & Analysis Center (SIAC) developed this Joint Intelligence Bulletin (JIB) to provide awareness on criminal and violent extremist use of emojis to facilitate criminal and violent activity. This information is intended to support federal, state, and local government agencies and authorities and other entities in developing and prioritizing protective and support measures relating to an existing or emerging threat to homeland security.

(U) First Amendment Acknowledgement

(U) The CFIX, SD-LECC, and SIAC recognize Americans have constitutionally protected rights to assemble, speak, and petition the government. The CFIX, SD-LECC, and SIAC safeguard these rights and are only reporting on these activities due to the potential use of rhetoric and/or propaganda that could be used to incite individuals to carry out acts of violence. Additionally, potential criminality exhibited by certain members of a group does not negate the constitutional rights of the group itself or its law-abiding participants to exercise their individual liberties under the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Unless specifically noted, the social media reporting in this product originated from users whose affiliation and credibility are unknown and are included for the purpose of providing broad trends in online behavior and situational awareness for law enforcement and first responders.

(U) Key Judgments

(U//FOUO) The CFIX, SD-LECC, and SIAC assess that criminals and violent extremists operating online are using emojis to promote their membership or association to groups operating online, to show support of activity by other members of their online community, and to promote calls for attacks. Further, as criminals and violent extremists increase their use of social media to operate and communicate with one another, groups or members may adopt and use new emojis as they become available to remain difficult to detect by law enforcement. Identified emojis can be used by law enforcement and homeland security professionals as online indicators to identify criminal and violent extremist accounts and activity across various social media platforms.

(U//FOUO) We assess that as emojis continue to appear as evidence within the legal system, prosecutors and judges will need to be more aware of the importance and meaning of emojis in online communication, particularly how they are used by criminals and violent extremists. Consideration should be given to the

cultural and generational differences of emoji interpretation along with depictions of emojis, which may vary across different platforms and devices and could affect the interpretation.

(U) **Overview**

(U//FOUO) Since their inception in 1999, emojis have increasingly been described as a "global language" and have started to replace text on social media and other online communications.[1] Oftentimes the overall meaning of online communication is dependent on the use of an emoji. This can cause difficulties as people's interpretation of emojis can vary due to cultural and generational distinctions, individual perceptions, and varied appearance across different platforms, devices, and operating systems, which may alter the intended sentiment/meaning of the emoji. Individual interpretations and limited insight into the use of emojis could potentially lead law enforcement to misidentify, miscommunicate, or underestimate a potential threat, criminal activity, or violent extremist activity.

(U) **What is an Emoji?**

(U//FOUO) An emoji is a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication. The first emoji was created in 1999 as a way to add informational and emotional subtext to a message and in 2010 the Unicode Consortium, a nonprofit group that maintains text standards for computers, officially adopted emojis as a legitimate means of communication.[2] Over time, emojis have evolved from being a creative way to display weather, time, and emotions to now being utilized daily to convey information across diverse languages, cultures, and lifestyles. Emojis have been integrated into computers, smart phones and other mobile devices, websites, and social media applications. Due to their wide integration and the availability of 3,019 emojis (as of March 2019), they have become a key aspect in how people communicate with one another online.[3] To emphasize their prevalence, it is estimated that over five billion emojis are sent daily on the social networking app Facebook[USBUS] Messenger and over half of all comments on the social networking app Instagram[USBUS] include an emoji.[4]

(U) **Interpretation**

(U//FOUO) Emojis are increasingly used as a method of communication on social media and mobile messaging applications, oftentimes in place of text. An individual emoji or combination of emojis can have various interpretations based on cultural and generational differences and their application by the user. This is also true regarding the use of emojis by criminal and violent extremist groups. For example, the pill emoji 💊, has been used by individuals when selling drugs, by foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) when discussing poisons, and by domestic violent extremist (DVE) groups or members, particularly among white supremacist extremist (WSE) groups, when discussing the need to black-pill/red-pill others[i].

(U//FOUO) Emoji interpretations based on regional and cultural perspectives can also vary significantly. For example, in Western culture the thumbs up emoji 👍 may be used to symbolize satisfaction or approval, whereas in the Middle East, Greece and Australia it's interpreted as offensive. The angel emoji 😇, used in the West to represent concepts such as hope, faith, good deeds, innocence, etc., is used in China to represent death and can be perceived as a threat. A 2017 study of the top emojis used by Muslims in nine languages during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan highlighted a lack of uniformity. The study showed that Twitter[USBUS] posts with the hashtag #ramadan in English, Turkish, German, and Spanish most commonly included the red

[i] (U) The "black-pill" and "red-pill" phrases were adopted by WSEs from the Matrix film trilogy. WSE's use the phrase to refer to like-minded individuals who are deep into the ideology, to recruit others into their movement, or to identify opponents of their ideology/movement. For example, to be red pilled means to be part of, or identify with, the WSE ideology.

heart emoji ❤; Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi tweets used the crescent moon emoji 🌙; and Indonesian and French tweets used the praying hands emoji 🙏.[5,6,7]

(U//FOUO) Similar disparities can be seen in generational interpretations of emojis. For example, the peach emoji 🍑, is used more frequently as a sexual reference or a representation of a butt by younger generations than as a fruit which is more common with older generations. The eggplant emoji 🍆, is also used frequently by younger generations on its own or paired with other emojis as a sexual connotation of male genitalia. Another example is the fire emoji 🔥, which is frequently used by younger generations to refer to someone as hot or good looking.[8]

(U//FOUO) Emojis may vary in appearance based on which social media platform or mobile device is being used, which can lead to additional issues with interpretation. There are several emoji reference websites, such as "Emojipedia [USBUS]" or "Emoji Dictionary [USBUS]," that can be used to identify different emojis and their common meaning. Emojis can also be copied and pasted from these sites to use in keyword searches.

(U//FOUO) Use of emojis can also be highly dependent on how social media is used overall by the criminal organizations or violent extremists. Pairing emojis with specific hashtags, verbiage, interactions with other social media accounts, profile images, and general account content would all need to be considered when identifying criminal and violent extremist activity online.

(U) Criminal Use of Emojis

(U//FOUO) As criminals increase their use of social media to operate and communicate with one another, their use of emojis is also likely to increase in order to avoid detection. While criminals may also use code words to communicate, using emojis in place of specific words may indicate an evolution of their tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) as a means to limit search functionality and to prevent law enforcement detection. Criminals may use emojis in online posts, pictures, classified ads, social media profile pages, and communications with one another through mobile messaging applications, chatrooms, or text messages. These emojis may serve as indicators of criminal activity to include human trafficking, gang activity, drug use or sales, school threats, and other threats.

(U) Human Trafficking

(U//FOUO) In instances of human trafficking, emojis are often used to advertise victims for sex. These emojis can be found online, primarily on sites that are being used by criminals to facilitate human trafficking such as Listcrawler [USBUS], Craigslist [USBUS], and BedPage [USBUS]. They may also be associated with identified human trafficking networks operating on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat [USBUS], and Instagram. According to research done by a San Diego State University Information Systems Master's Program graduate, the more common emojis used in human trafficking include the rose 🌹, rosette 🏵, cherry 🍒, cherry blossom 🌸, growing heart 💗, airplane ✈, and crown 👑.[9] The combination of the emojis may also be indicative of a particular type of activity. For instance, a crown, growing hearts, and an airplane paired with roses 👑💗✈🌹🌹🌹 may indicate the availability of a victim, possibly underage or "child-like," who is confined to a certain area so the buyer must travel to him/her at an affordable price. Below are some examples of individual emojis used in human trafficking.[10]

Emoji*	Name	Potential Meaning
	Crown	• The victim is under house arrest • The victim is owned or controlled by a pimp or gang who acts as the administrator or manager and keeps the victim confined with certain perimeters • Another decision maker is involved in the transaction
	Rose	• The number of roses may indicate price to buy the victim
	Cherry	• Implies the victim is a virgin or that they are underage
	Growing Heart	• The victim is a minor underage or is "child-like" and is still growing
	Airplane	• The victim is being shipped in, "new in town", or in town temporarily • The victim has restricted movement and the buyer must travel to the designated city where the victim is located

*Images of emojis provided are used on Apple [USBUS] devices. Additional visual depictions may be found on emojipedia.org.

(U//FOUO) In a San Diego human trafficking case, officers presented the use of emojis as evidence to their case. The evidence included the dollar sign emoji 💲, which was used to indicate to the pimp/trafficker that the prostitute had been paid or had a sexual encounter (commonly referred to as a "date") pending. As an example, one dollar sign emoji 💲 would indicate $100 and two dollar sign emojis 💲 💲, would indicate $200. The footprint emoji 👣 was also used to indicate the "John", a term used to describe a sex buyer, had left. The officers used additional evidence, such as other text messages, to support their interpretation of the emojis.[11]

(U//FOUO) In February 2019, California prosecutors were tasked with proving a man arrested during a prostitution sting was guilty of pimping charges. Among the evidence was an Instagram conversation in which the defendant asked the victim if she was "down for yo crown" with a crown emoji 👑, which a detective stated was a statement that is specific to commercial sexual exploitation – often meaning "are you ready to be down and support me as your king?" The defendant later wrote "Teamwork make the dream work" with emojis of high heels 👠 and bags of money 💰, which prosecutors said implied a working relationship between the two of them. A human trafficking expert testified on the meaning behind the messages and emojis, but because of additional sufficient evidence, the ruling did not heavily rely on the interpretation of the emojis.[12,13]

(U) **Gangs**

(U//FOUO) In their criminal activities, gang members often use emojis in place of words to circumvent detection. This usage is often observed on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube [USBUS], Kik [USBUS], and WhatsApp [USBUS], where gangs will openly post their activities and potential for future activities, express threats, and intimidate rival gangs.[14] Gang members have been observed using specific emojis to openly display their gang affiliation online as well as using opposing gangs' emojis as a way to disrespect them. Gang members will taunt opposing gang members with emojis by posting other gangs' symbols upside down as a sign of disrespect.[15] The most common manner that emojis are used by gang members is in a string or cluster to dictate a full sentence, communicate a thought, or represent a threat or taunt towards opposing gang members often referred to as "internet banging".[16] Members of different gangs may use the same emojis to represent an alternate meaning relevant to their respective gang. Below are some examples of emoji and emoji strings used by gangs.[17]

Emoji*	Name	Potential Meaning
	• Man running, Knife • Man running, Scissors	• Possible threat to stab or cut someone
	• Gas Pump, Blood Type "A", "NG" button • Gas Pump	• Used to spell out "gang" • Gas pump may also be used alone to reference the word "gang" Note: Earlier versions of the gas pump included a "G"
	• Police Officer, Gun • Police Officer, Bomb, Explosion, Gun	• Potential dislike of law enforcement or depending on the context of how it is used, may indicate a potential threat towards law enforcement
	• "Rock on" hand gesture • Two thumbs up	• Resembles the letter "H" and used primarily by the Crips
	• Black top hat	• Affiliated with the Bloods

*Images of emojis provided are used on Apple devices. Additional visual depictions may be found on emojipedia.org.

(U//FOUO) In 2014, a New York teenager was charged with a felony for making a terroristic threat after posting "Let's Kill the Cops" with emojis of a gun 🔫 and a police officer 👮 on his Facebook profile. The 16-year-old posted the message to social media just hours after two New York Police Department officers were shot and killed while sitting in their patrol car. A grand jury declined to indict the teenager, and the case was dismissed. In 2017, the same teenager was arrested and indicted for conspiracy and attempted murder along with several other members of his gang for allegedly using Facebook [USBUS], YouTube [USBUS], and an array of emojis to post violent threats towards members of a rival gang and brag about crimes they had committed. The emojis were used to taunt rival gangs and were included with photos and videos of the gang members on rival gang territory. The teenager and eleven fellow gang members were charged with conspiracy and attempted murder for ten different shooting incidents with rival gangs.[18]

(U) **Drugs**

(U//FOUO) Emojis are also commonly used in online conversations regarding drug paraphernalia and sales where certain emojis may indicate a specific type of drug, its potency, or its price. Using emojis in this manner has been observed across various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Kik, Signal [USBUS], Wickr [USBUS], Discord [USBUS], and WhatsApp and on various other social media platforms and encrypted mobile messaging applications offering emojis as a communication capability.[19] While some emojis may hold the same universal meaning, others may be used differently depending on the individual using the emoji(s) in their communications. Emojis representing drugs are most often depicted by a single emoji rather than a string of emojis to create a sentence as with gang members' usage. For example, Australian law enforcement determined a 19-year-old dealt drugs to interested buyers through text messages using lightning bolt ⚡ and heart emojis ❤ to represent MDMA and ecstasy.[20] The following chart shows some examples of emojis used in conversations involving drugs.[21,22,23]

Emoji*	Name	Potential Meaning
❄️⛄☁️🐡	Snowflake, Snowman, Cloud with Snow, Blowfish	• Cocaine
💊	Pill capsule	• Variety of pills
🎱	8 Ball	• 8th ounce of an illegal substance
🎒	Backpack	• Pound of an illegal substance
🍯🐝💧🕯️	Honey Pot, Honey Bee, Drop, Candle	• Dabs, Wax, Honey, Drip, Crumble
🌳🌲🥦🌹	Tree, Broccoli, Rose/Flower	• Marijuana bud
🐐	Goat	• "Greatest of all time"
🚀	Rocket	• High potency

*Images of emojis provided are used on Apple devices. Additional visual depictions may be found on emojipedia.org.

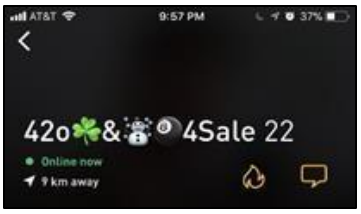
(U//FOUO) Individuals looking to sell drugs online may also create a "menu" with prices and emojis to represent the drugs being sold. A Mexican drug gang would use the WhatsApp application to provide potential buyers with a "drug menu" of approximately ten different drugs of varying amounts and potency when conducting transactions. In particular, the menu included marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, and ecstasy, and at the end of at least one of the menus used was an emoji of a shopping cart 🛒 following a message indicating daily home delivery all year long.[24]

August 6, 2018 at 5:23 PM
🔥🔥Menu🔥🔥
Girl scout cookies🔥🔥:$140oz/75h/50Q
Jungle Cookie🔥🍪:$125oz/$70half/45Q
Og Kush Smalls🔥: $75oz 135/2 $250QP
(More strains coming soon)
5 dose 250mg brownies $20ea $15 for 3+
Cartis: $35 for 1. 30 ea for 2+ 5/$125
Pineapple express, strawberry gelato, zkittlez, blueberry piña colada
Adderall (25mg XR): $7 each
Black lsd gel tabs 350 UG: $10 ea all day!
Xanax:1/$5 10/35 50/$125 $100/225
Whites and green hulks clean, no chalk🔥
$60/g 30/half 180/ball
Delivery 24/7 (san diego)
Minimum order for delivery $50
Venmo:@
app
Apple pay, zelle, paypal also accepted
Cheesequake: $135oz/$70half/45Q
GSC🍪:$140oz/$75half/50Q
Jet Fuel OG🚀: 135oz/75half/45Q
Fire OG🔥: $125oz/$70half/40Q
Sfv OG:125oz/65half/35Q
Kush Candy full gram cartridges $30 each
5/$25ea 10/$20ea 20/$18ea 50/$16ea
100/$15ea! Best quality, lowest prices!
All distillate is lab tested at 90-93% THC and cut with cannabis terpenes in delicious flavors. No harmful additives or pesticides. One hitter quitters don't sleep!
Adderall (25mg XR): $7 each
Shrooms: $35 eighth $60Q 100 half 175oz
Black lsd gel tabs 350 UG: $10 ea all day!
~~Xanax:1/$5 10/35 50/$125 100/$225~~
Activisa 5oz bottles: $85ea 2 for 150
$60/g 30/half 180/ball
Minimum order for delivery $50
Venmo:@
app

(U//FOUO) In San Diego, California, a drug dealer utilized emojis to create a drug menu, which he posted online. Common emojis used by the suspect both on the drug menu and throughout other drug related posts included the bomb 💣 and fire 🔥 emojis and the snowflake ❄️ and snowman ☃️ emojis. According to the narcotics officer working the case, the bomb 💣 and fire 🔥 emoji commonly mean "this is the best of the

best, everyone loves it" and the snowflake ❄ and snowman ☃ emoji refer to cocaine. The suspect used the social media platform Snapchat to advertise the drugs for sale. [25]

(U//FOUO) While some emojis are used for specific meanings in online communications, emojis are also found displayed on social media profiles and may hold the same meanings, particularly when used with other indicators such as letters or phrases. For instance, the diamond emoji 💎 found in an online profile name with a capital "T" indicates the user may be advertising crystal meth, sometimes referred to as "Tina", for sale.[26]



(U//FOUO) A San Diego, California narcotics officer recovered evidence related to a suspected drug dealer dealing meth and heroin. The suspect received a text message which in part stated "When u get a chance, let me know when is a good time" followed by the smiling emoji wearing sunglasses 😎, the money with wings emoji 💸, and the needle emoji 💉. The officer noted that the inclusion of the needle emoji 💉 was important to the text message as it indicates the connection to drugs.[27]

(U) **General and School Threats**

(U//FOUO) Emojis used to convey a threat are highly dependent on the context and the intended meaning of the user. Since emojis have no clear definition apart from their coded classifications, their usage and meanings can be interpreted differently by various individuals. Depending on how the emoji is used, it may indicate the intent to threaten or harass another person. These perceived threatening statements can be seen in private communications but more often appear in social media posts as either an emoji accompanying a text statement, a photo, or a string of emojis. The below chart shows some examples of how emojis have been used in the past to depict a threatening statement.[28,29,30]

Emoji*	Name	Potential Meaning
😶	Silent Face	• Could be interpreted as a threat to someone to keep their mouth shut, or else
👮🔫	Police Officer, Gun	• May indicate a potential threat to shoot or kill law enforcement
🔫🔪💣	Gun, Knife, Bomb	• Depending on what accompanies the emojis, they may indicate a potential weapon to be used to cause or inflict harm to another
🚿	Shower	• Could be interpreted as "shower with bullets" depending on context
✂💈	Scissors, Barber Pole	• With context, could mean to cut someone
🤾🎳	Person, Bowling Ball	• With context, could mean to go hit someone

*Images of emojis provided are used on Apple devices. Additional visual depictions may be found on emojipedia.org.

(U//FOUO) In April 2019, a Grand Island, Nebraska student posted the following comments on a social media site to a group of fellow students: "Tomorrow gonna be hella fire 🔥 be there" and "Don't show up to school tomorrow 🔫". The posts themselves "…set in motion of series of events that caused substantial disruption to the school environment". After the author of these posts was found and the case entered the court system, it was determined that the posts constituted a terroristic threat against the school and the student was suspended. As stated by the court, the defendant's posts were open to multiple avenues of interpretation to include interpretations of violence and threats.[31]

(U//FOUO) In August 2019, a 15-year-old Fresno, California student was arrested, booked, and charged with making terroristic threats after posting a photo of a Walmart USBUS gun case filled with rifles along with the words "Don't come to school tomorrow!!!" with nearly twenty different facial expression emojis. The combination of the photo, text, and emojis gives a full picture of the threat as a whole and what the teenager could have been alluding to without making an explicit threat.[32]

(U//FOUO) Over the past several years, emojis have been appearing in cases where they were included as part of a statement perceived as a threat. While many of these statements may appear to be directed at a specific person, some have been generalized, such as school threats. Sent mostly to a group of individuals through mobile messaging applications such as SnapChat and Instagram and often screenshotted and sent through other social media platforms, these threats have resulted in expedited heavy law enforcement response. One threat, initiated on SnapChat, included the text "Watch out West Valley High School something bad might happen today" accompanied with gun 🔫 and bomb emojis 💣. Another message said "Like I said buddy be careful" along with winking-face 😉 and gun 🔫 emojis. In a third message, the individual said "It may not be today but it will be tomorrow" followed by a skull and crossbones emoji ☠.[34] In another instance, a 12-year-old was arrested and charged with making threats towards their school on Instagram. The messages included the text "Killing" followed by a gun emoji 🔫 and then "Meet me in the library Tuesday" followed by gun 🔫, knife 🔪, and bomb 💣 emojis.[35]

(U//FOUO) According to a review of school threat related suspicious activity reports (SARs) received by the SD-LECC in 2019, some school threat SARs detailed the use of emojis. Emojis alone are not an indication of a threat but typically accompany words, photos, or oftentimes both. Examples of school threat SAR wording included, "Don't come to school tomorrow," "Tomorrow is going to be lit," and "I have a list." These phrases can be accompanied by the gun 🔫, fire 🔥, bomb 💣, knife 🔪, and/or devil 😈 emojis. In the case of these phrases, the emoji is an integral part of the perceived threat.[36,37]

(U//FOUO) Other threats posted to social media have appeared to be directed towards law enforcement. In 2017, a 17-year-old was arrested in New York for making a terrorist threat in a post on Facebook. Interpreted as a threat to kill law enforcement, the post included an emoji of a law enforcement officer paired with several gun emojis 👮🔫🔫, a string of emojis popular among criminals and other individuals who espouse anti-law enforcement rhetoric.[38] Although a grand jury did not indict the defendant due to uncertainties over the criminal intent of the post, during court proceedings, the prosecutor conveyed the message was a definite threat towards law enforcement due to the following factors:

- A class of victim was clearly identified (law enforcement)
- The gun emoji 🔫 was used three times
- The placement of the emoji was done so that the gun was aimed at the emoji of a policeman's head 👮🔫
- The same individual posted other threatening messages earlier in the day[39,40]

(U) **Violent Extremist Use of Emojis**[41]

(U//FOUO) Some violent extremists use emojis to promote their membership or association of online groups, to show support of activity by other members of their online community, and to promote calls for violence. Emojis are often paired with hashtags and terminology that represent specific violent extremist ideologies. These symbols, emojis, and terminology become online indicators, which can be used to identify violent extremist accounts and activity across various social media platforms, particularly when used in the username or account descriptions. Use of emojis by violent extremists is not new; however, it has become more common for emojis to be used in place of text, which can make threat identification through keyword searches more difficult, presenting a challenge for law enforcement who may not understand the meaning behind the emojis.[42]

(U//FOUO) The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), for example, has used emojis with no text to name their channels on Telegram (a Russian-based encrypted messaging application) in attempts to avoid suspension. In November 2019, ISIS supporters shared links for a channel promoting ISIS provinces in Libya whose channel name was the scissors emoji ✂ with no text. Individual ISIS supporters have also used emojis in place of screen names. For example, an ISIS supporter has recently used the black flag emoji 🏴 as the only identifier for their Telegram profile. They have also used emojis to promote links to their channels. In early 2019, pro-ISIS Telegram users promoted a channel that provided lone wolf guidance using only a truck emoji 🚚. The truck emoji 🚚, representing vehicle ramming attacks, served as a hyperlink to join the channel. Pro-ISIS Telegram users have also been observed stringing together emojis that translate into rough sentences when using free online translation services such as Google[USBUS] Translate and Bing Microsoft[USBUS] Translator. They are also using emoji translation sites such as EmojiTranslate[USBUS], which allows users to enter text in over 100 language variants and have it translated to emojis.[43]

(U//FOUO) WSEs have been observed using emojis to promote and categorize their channel networks on Telegram. The channel name is provided as a hyperlink with one of six emojis listed in front of the channel name to identify the channel type and expected content. The light bulb emoji 💡 is used to represent "Informative" channels, chatrooms are identified with the megaphone emoji 📣, art channels by the artist palette emoji 🎨, meme channels by the frog face emoji 🐸, music by the musical notes emoji 🎶, and channels sharing news and information on "In Real Life" (IRL) activism by the speaking head emoji 🗣.[44]

(U//FOUO) Violent extremists have also used emojis to identify attack methods and potential targets. For example, when discussing attacks on religious institutions, they may use the emojis representing churches ⛪, mosques 🕌, or synagogues 🕍 in place of text. When inciting or providing guidance for lone wolf attacks, they have used emojis to represent attack methods such as vehicle rammings 🚚, edged weapon attacks 🔪, and IEDs 💣 with and without corresponding text. In August 2018, Safaa Boular was convicted of plotting an ISIS-inspired terror attack in the UK. Boular had plans to travel to Syria and die in a suicide bombing or to attack the British museum if she was unable to travel. In a message to her online mentor, Boular questioned whether or not she could be sure of killing herself and her target when detonating a suicide vest. Her message read "Does the pin make me go 💥" using the explosion emoji to represent the detonation.[45,46]

(U//FOUO) Violent extremists also use emojis to promote concepts and ideas related to their particular ideologies. Below are examples of how emojis are used by foreign terrorist organization (FTO) and some domestic violent extremist (DVE) social media users.

(U) **FTO Use of Emojis**

(U//FOUO) Some FTOs and their supporters using social media can be seen posting photos of themselves, foreign fighters, FTO leaders, and other supporters holding up the finger of *Tawheed (or Tawhid)*, which is a single raised index finger often shown in images posted by online Islamic extremists. The concept of *"tawhid,"* or "oneness" of God, often refers to the first half of the shahada (Muslim profession of faith) and is a concept also recognized by Muslims unaffiliated with Islamic extremist ideology. Online, the gesture can be referred to as a type of "salute" when affiliated with Islamic extremists or designated FTOs. Supporters also use the index finger pointing up emoji ☝ to convey the same message when posting content showing support for FTOs.[47]

(U//FOUO) Some pro-FTO social media users post images of or make references to *green bird(s)* or *green birds of paradise* (Islamic symbol for martyred souls of the believers) in posts regarding martyrs. The *green bird* term is sometimes used alone or in conjunction with *shaheed* (martyr) or *shahada* (martyrdom). In some instances, FTOs and their supporters will use only the image of a green bird, or a green heart emoji, paired with a bird emoji 💚🐦.[48]

Inspire Guide 3 - Comment On France Arrests
" O our Muslim brothers in France, the heroes of lone jihad, we are calling you not to sit silent on this incident and instigating you to carry out jihadi operations against this criminal state..."
#Lone
AN EYE FOR AN EYE
A TOOTH FOR A T...
FORGET THAT
THEY DARE TO RAISE THEIR HAND AT US, WE BREAK IT THEN SLAP 'EM BACK WITH THEIR BROKEN HAND
CHOOSE YOUR PICK
Brothers and sisters, join the IS twitter army
THE ISLAMIC STATE
200
84
40
54
35
24
23
14
14
6
2
The competition has already began!
So when will you take part in the race and leave your score on the leaderboard!

(U//FOUO) The table below shows some individual emojis used by FTOs and their supporters and what that emoji may mean.[49]

Emoji	Name	Potential Meaning
☝	Index Finger Pointing Up	• Used as a digitized way of displaying the finger of Tawheed
🦝	Wolf	• Used by FTOs and their supporters when discussing lone wolf activities (inciting attacks, providing attack guidance, etc.)
🚚	Truck	• Used by FTOs and their supporters to represent vehicle ramming attacks
💉💊	Syringe/ Pill	• Used to represent chemical and biological attacks
🎁	Wrapped Present	• Used when discussing "surprise" attacks

🔥	Fire / Flame	• Used when discussing and encouraging arson attacks
💥💣	Explosion / Bomb	• Used to represent explosives
🔪⚔️	Knife / Swords	• Used when inciting edged weapon attacks

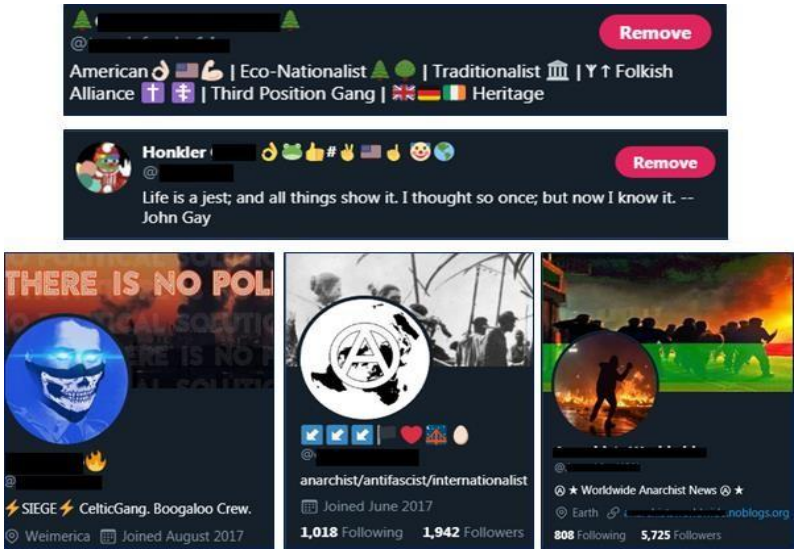
*Images of emojis provided are used on Apple devices. Additional visual depictions may be found on emojipedia.org.

(U) **DVE Use of Emojis**

(U//FOUO) In addition to emojis, violent extremists may also use emoticons (human expressions made using keyboard characters). For example, following the 3 August 2019 mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, WSEs on Telegram began to praise the attacker by giving him the "double Roman" salute using the emoticon, \o/. The double Roman salute, a gesture where both arms are fully extended with palms down and fingers touching, is used by WSEs to represent accelerationism. When depicting accelerationism with emojis, WSEs will most frequently use the fire emoji 🔥.[50]

(U//FOUO) WSEs have also used meme campaigns to turn innocuous symbols into symbols of hate. In 2017, WSEs began a meme campaign to make the "OK" hand symbol a symbol of white power. The OK hand symbol emoji 👌 is used extensively by WSEs on various social media platforms. In September 2019, the OK hand symbol was listed in the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) Hate Symbol Database. WSEs on 4chan and 8chan started another meme campaign in early 2019 to take ownership of the LGBTQ flag. When discussing the pride flag, they say it is more representative of their beliefs as it shows individual colors with no blending. The flag emoji 🏳️‍🌈 is frequently paired with the phrase "Separate is Beautiful." These discussions have gradually made their way to WSE networks on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Gab [USBUS], where WSEs are adding the rainbow flag emoji 🏳️‍🌈 to their profiles and using the flag to create propaganda.[51,52,53,54]

(U//FOUO) Other DVEs use emojis in a manner to self-identify as part of an ideology or movement as opposed to using them in place of words or directing attacks. While WSEs use emojis in this way as well, anarchist extremists, for example, use emojis as a way to identify themselves as a follower of a particular movement within anarchism. Some of the prominent emojis anarchist extremists use are the encircled "A" Ⓐ, the raised fist ✊, and the black flag 🏴.[55]


Remove
American | Eco-Nationalist | Traditionalist | Folkish
Alliance | Third Position Gang | Heritage
Honkler
Remove
Life is a jest; and all things show it. I thought so once; but now I know it. -- John Gay
THERE IS NO POL
SIEGE CelticGang. Boogaloo Crew.
Weimerica Joined August 2017
anarchist/antifascist/internationalist
Joined June 2017
1,018 Following 1,942 Followers
Worldwide Anarchist News
Earth
808 Following 5,725 Followers

(U//FOUO) The table below shows some individual emojis used by WSEs and anarchist extremists and their supporters and what that particular emoji means when observed online.[56]

Emoji	Name	Potential Meaning
	Frog	• Used by WSEs to represent Pepe the Frog and sometimes "Kekistan", a satirical country of origin of internet "shitposters" who also worship the Egyptian God, Kek, represented with the head of a frog
	Clown World	• Used by WSEs to represent clown world, which they developed as a meme in early 2019 and often used with posts of a clown Pepe the Frog named Honk Honkler, or Honk Honk, meaning Heil Hitler
	Number Sign	• Used by WSEs to represent "Heil Hitler" due to the appearance of two stacked capital H
	Flame Fuel Pump	• Used by WSEs on their own or together to show support of accelerationism
	Pine Tree	• Used by WSEs to represent their support of eco-fascism or eco-nationalism
	Nuclear / Radioactive Sign	• Used by WSEs to show membership or support for Atomwaffen Division or similar groups such as The Base
	Lightning Bolts	• SS Bolts commonly used by WSEs to represent the Nazi-era symbol for the Schutzstaffel
	OK Hand Symbol	• Adopted by WSEs with the intended meaning of "White Power"
	Black Flag	• Used by anarchist extremists to self-identify as a follower of anarchism
	Encircled Capital A	• Used by anarchist extremists to self-identify as a follower of anarchism which was derived from the slogan "Anarchy is Order", the "A" represents "anarchy" and the "O" represents "order"
	Three Down Left Arrows	• Used by anarchist extremists, particularly those identifying with anti-fascism and other far-left organizations, to represent anti-establishment
	Raised Fist	• Used by anarchist extremists as a sign of solidarity or to show strength in numbers

(U) Impact on the Legal System

(U//FOUO) An integral function of United States courts is to interpret communications in the pursuit of law. With the widespread advent of emojis in the 2000s and the added emoji keyboard on mobile devices, websites, and social media platforms, emojis have become an increasingly popular method of communication and have made their way into the US justice system. The interpretation of emoji communications and the possible associated criminal intent has become a complicated effort among legal practitioners. Emojis can be used to substitute words, reinforce statements, communicate a mixed message, provide emphasis, or communicate a compliment, allowing for multiple interpretations. The difficulty of interpretation and the added element of free speech has opened the door to speculation in court regarding the meaning of and penalties for the use of emojis to facilitate or commit criminal and violent acts.

(U//FOUO) The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has concluded that a "true threat" is a "statement in which, in the entire context and under all circumstances, a reasonable person would foresee would be interpreted by those to whom the statement is communicated as a serious expression of intent to inflict bodily harm upon

that person". It goes on to state that a defendant does not have to actually carry out the threat or be capable of carrying out the threat as long as the defendant meets the requirement of either the intent to or knowingly communicates a threat.[57] With this precedent, an emoji can be used to communicate a "true threat".

(U//FOUO) At this time, the outcome of criminal cases involving the use of emojis is still under debate and is largely based on the interpretation and judgment of the court where the case is tried. According to a Santa Clara University law professor, who has been tracking all references to the words "emoji" or "emoticon" that show up in US court opinions since 2004, there has been an exponential rise in emoji and emoticon references in the last four years. From 2004-2018, there were 171 total instances of the words emoji or emoticon being used in US court opinions, of which 30%, or 53 cases, were in 2018. He notes that although the number of opinions referencing emojis is growing rapidly, there have yet to be any major substantive rulings interpreting emojis.[58]

(U) Evolution of Emojis

(U//FOUO) Emojis continue to evolve, growing from a mere 176 emojis in 1999 to now over 3,100 unique emojis in the Unicode Standard as of October 2019.[59,60] Each time a new batch of emojis is released, there are new faces, animals, and foods, but there are also new ways for people to express themselves. An update in 2017 included three new gender-neutral options, and in 2018, an update included new cultural symbols such as a mooncake and nazar amulet .[61] Most recently, emoji symbols for deaf people , people in wheelchairs and couples with mixed genders and skin tones were released .[62] The universal language of emojis continues to grow, providing an easier way for people to communicate across cultures and languages.

(U//FOUO) The updates by Apple's iPhone operating system (iOS) and Google's Android operating systems are not always due to new additions but sometimes also due to updates to current emojis. In 2016, Apple replaced the pistol gun emoji with a green water gun shortly after the Unicode Consortium, Apple, and Microsoft [USBUS] argued against a proposed rifle emoji.[63] This decision followed several reports of the pistol emoji landing people in trouble with the law for making online threats.[64] It is possible that iOS, Android, and the Unicode Consortium may have to continue to make additional updates and turn down proposed emojis due to the negative use of emojis to facilitate criminal activity and make threats online. These updates are often available through a wide variety of resources available online. The following is a non-inclusive list of resources available to maintain an awareness of emojis as they evolve.

- (U) **Emojipedia** - Used to identify different emojis. They can also be copied and pasted from this site into keyword searches. (http://emojipedia.org/)
- (U) **Emoji Translate** - Used to translate text into a string of emojis or vice versa. The translator can translate to and from over 100 different languages. (https://emojitranslate.com/)
- (U) **Emoji Foundation**[USBUS] - An emoji resource for emoji art, games, news, and meanings. It is also home to an emoji dictionary. (http://www.emojifoundation.com/)
- (U) **Unicode**[USBUS] - Maintains a full emoji list which shows how each emoji appears on different devices. (http://unicode.org/emoji/charts/full-emoji-list.html)
- (U) **Emoji Tracker**[USBUS] - Tracks emojis as they are used on Twitter in real time to show the popularity of each emoji. (http://emojitracker.com/)
- (U) **Emojiguide**[USBUS] - Used to identify different emojis. They can also be copied and pasted from this site into keyword searches. (https://emojiguide.org/)

(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) The CFIX, SD-LECC, and SIAC assess that the use of emojis to facilitate criminal and violent extremist activity online will continue to rise and present complications for those investigating this behavior. Through increasing law enforcement's understanding of the criminal and violent extremist use of emojis and the difficulty in detecting the online activity through keyword searches, the TTPs in online activity can be easily identified. Further, as additional emojis are released by the Unicode Consortium, criminals and violent extremists are likely to adapt and use new emojis to avoid detection. These new emojis would also allow for easier communication methods for criminals and violent extremists across cultures and languages.

(U//FOUO) We assess that emojis will continue to appear in US courts as evidence. Court officials will need to be more aware of the importance of the emojis to the overall communication being presented as evidence given the different depictions of emojis across different platforms and generational differences, particularly with how that could affect interpretation.

(U) Reporting Notice

(U) The CFIX, SD-LECC, and SIAC have no information to indicate any specific or credible threats to their areas of responsibility related to the contents of this bulletin; however, this product is being provided for situational awareness. For additional information on this product, please contact the CFIX at (407) 858-3950 or CFIX@ocfl.net, the SD-LECC at (858) 495-7200 or info@sd-lecc.org, or the SIAC at (801) 965-3838 or SIAC@utah.gov.

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